

NHMLAC Birding Guide

A BRIEF GUIDE TO BACKYARD BIRDS
AROUND LOS ANGELES IN THE SPRING



**NATURAL
HISTORY
MUSEUM**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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Los Angeles
Department of
Water & Power

Welcome to your NHMLAC Birding Guide!

The following pages will help you identify the common species of birds that you are likely to encounter while observing wildlife in the L.A. area.



STEP 1

Discover Wildlife

Help us investigate the incredible nature all around L.A.— in backyards, schools, and in neighborhoods, and discover the wildlife all around you.



STEP 2

Record What You See

Snap a photo of the animals, plants, and fungi you find, and when and where you found them. The more detailed the observation, the better!



STEP 3

Share What You Find

Submit your observations to iNaturalist, available on the App store for OS or Android.

For help using iNaturalist

- Consult the tutorial in the iNaturalist app
- Visit the Help section at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)
- E-mail us at nature@nhm.org or call us at 213.763.3272

Hooded Oriole

Icterus cucullatus



There is hardly a better sign of the return of spring in the Los Angeles area than the arrival in March of these colorful visitors.

Appearance Adult males are boldly colored in deep yellow and black (see image above), females are more uniformly greenish-yellow; one-year-old males resemble females but have a black throat.

Habitat Their woven nest is almost always built in palm trees, suspended from the underside of a frond.

Notes These orioles feed mainly on nectar and insects, and will often visit sugar-water feeders.

Bushtit

Psaltriparus minimus



Our smallest songbirds, Bushtits travel in twittering flocks, moving among trees and shrubs gleaning stems and leaves for small insects.

Appearance If you can get a close look, you can tell the white-eyed females from the dark-eyed males.

Habitat The Bushtit nest is distinctive—a 10-inch-long hanging pouch made of soft fibers, down and spider webs, with a small entrance near the top. Bushtits are common year-round residents in urban Los Angeles.

Notes Bushtits are the only New World representatives of a small family otherwise found only from Europe to Southeast Asia.

Allen's Hummingbird

Selasphorus sasin



This rufous and green jewel is now the most common hummingbird in most gardens around Los Angeles, though a few decades back it was restricted to the Channel Islands and Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Notes Our abundant exotic plantings have allowed it to spread and, along with the slightly larger Anna's Hummingbird, it is a familiar sight year round. Watch carefully for other hummingbird species that may pass through in spring: Rufous, Black-chinned, and Costa's.

Cooper's Hawk

Accipiter cooperii



While many birds of prey have declined with expanding urbanization, the Cooper's Hawk is an increasingly common sight around Los Angeles.

Appearance Like most raptors, the females are larger and heavier than the males.

Notes These are bird-hunting hawks, often making the rounds around our feeders or other places where sparrows, finches, doves, and other birds might congregate.

House Finch

Haemorhous mexicanus



One of the most familiar urban birds of Los Angeles, the House Finch is common and confiding, often nesting in porches and backyard trees and structures.

Appearance The feather color of males may vary from deep red to orange or even yellow (the color comes from carotenoid, organic pigments, found in their food). The streaky brown females lack these colors.

Notes House Finches are susceptible to mycoplasma infections, often appearing as swollen or weepy eyes; dirty feeders aid the spread of this disease, so it is always important to keep seed feeders and birdbaths clean. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has used citizen scientists to track the occurrence of mycoplasma infections in House Finches in North America and NHM Ornithology Curator, Allison Shultz, has conducted years of research on the populations' genetic response to exposure to this disease.

Western Tanager

Piranga ludoviciana



Many migratory birds pass through the Los Angeles area from March through May on their way to more northerly breeding grounds. Various warblers, flycatchers, vireos, buntings and other songbirds can sometimes be seen in good numbers in our gardens and parks.

Appearance One of the most striking songbirds moving through the Los Angeles area is the Western Tanager—the yellow, red and black male is unmistakable.

Habitat These birds breed commonly from southeast Alaska through the mountains of western Canada and the U.S., including our local mountains.

Notes Despite their name, these tanagers and their close relatives are in the cardinal (Cardinalidae) family rather than the true tanagers of the family Thraupidae that are nearly restricted to the Neotropics.

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus



This is the quintessential urban sparrow, scrappily grabbing bits of fallen food at outdoor eateries and sometimes even living full time inside some of our large warehouse stores.

Habitat Introduced into North America in the late 1800s, these human commensals were common in California by 1900.

Notes Despite their adaptability in our urban areas, House Sparrows have been shown to be declining in many areas, particularly in their native European range, perhaps, in part, to the increased industrialization of agriculture.

Black Phoebe

Sayornis nigricans



Urban Los Angeles provides the resources that this familiar insect-eater needs: abundant insect prey on or near the ground, mud (because of our irrigation) that is used in nest-building, and shelter (eaves, building ledges, bridges, culverts) that provide an overhang for the nest. As a result, few urban neighborhoods lack this species.

Appearance The Black Phoebe is easily told by its blackish plumage (contrasting with a white belly), peaked head shape, and habit of constantly dipping its tail when perched.

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Common Raven

Corvus corax



Crows are quintessential generalists, able to adapt to changing environments and exploiting a broad range of foods. Common Ravens have also increased around urban L.A., taking advantage of building ledges, power poles, and other structures for nest sites.

Appearance Ravens are best told from crows by their larger size, heavier bills, wedge-shaped (rather than squared) tails, longer wings, and deeper voice. Unlike crows, ravens spend time soaring in the air.

Habitat Despite a dip in crow numbers after the peak of the West Nile Virus outbreaks several years ago, crow numbers are generally far higher in urban southern California than they were decades ago. The abundant trees we have planted provide nesting and roosting sites, and fruit trees, outdoor pet food, garbage, small vertebrate prey and many other offerings keep them well fed.

Yellow-chevroned Parakeet

Brotogeris chiriri



This is one of nearly a dozen parrot species breeding in the wild in southern California—all originally imported for the pet trade.

Appearance Our smallest species, the Yellow-chevroned is bright grass-green with a yellow patch on each wing. Depending on where you live, you might also watch (and listen!) for the larger, square-tailed Red-crowned Parrot (green with a bright red forehead), the Mitred Parakeet (deep green with a dark red forehead and long pointed tail), and the Nanday Parakeet (green with a black face, light blue breast, and red "thighs") along with several less common species.

Swainson's Thrush

Catharus ustulatus



This is one of the most vocal of the nocturnal migrants that pass through the Los Angeles skies in spring (mainly late April through May).

Habitat Here's a species that migrates through our area in spring, though they seek shaded woodlands during the day and you might only rarely see one.

Notes Some warm and calm May night, in the hours after dark or just before dawn, try giving a listen (taking advantage of our current reduction in vehicle and airplane traffic noise)—the distinctive "queeee?" call is given every few seconds by birds passing high overhead in the night sky.

More information

HOODED ORIOLE

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Oriole

BUSHTIT

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/bushtit>

ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Allens_Hummingbird

COOPER'S HAWK

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Coopers_Hawk

HOUSE FINCH

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/house_finch

WESTERN TANAGER

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Tanager

HOUSE SPARROW

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/House_Sparrow

BLACK PHOEBE

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black_Phoebe

AMERICAN CROW

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/american_crow

COMMON RAVEN

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Raven

YELLOW-CHEVRONED PARAKEET

<https://ebird.org/species/yecpar>

SWAINSON'S THRUSH

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Swainsons_Thrush

[nhm.org/nature](https://www.nhm.org/nature)

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